Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XXVII

Ernst Jordan
Gillespie County

By MYRTLE MURRAY
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JUST five days before Christmas 1845 the white winged "Margaretha" anchored in the harbor in Galveston. It was one of the many ship loads of German immigrants who were arriving in Texas according to contracts with the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas. Among those on board were two young couples who had truly "put their hands to the plough and never looked backward." Even the loss of Christmas festivities (doubly dear to the heart of the early Germans) was naught in comparison with the golden opportunities they thought awaited them in Texas.

They were Ernst Jordan, barely 24 years of age, his wife, Wilhelmina, and their chubby baby daughter Johanna, from Wehrstadt, Sachsen of the Kingdom of Hanover; and Ernst Jordan's elder sister, her husband, Mr. Kuckuk, and their child. They transferred to a smaller boat which brought them down the coast to Indianola. Here the Society had bought some land and a landing place for German immigrants, and made some provision for receiving them. From there they expected to go overland to New Braunfels which was a much shorter route than to go from Galveston. Since there were practically no roads and overland travellers were in continuous danger from Indian attacks the Society felt that it was wise to provide a landing place that would enable the immigrants to reach New Braunfels by the shortest route.

At last they were on Texas soil! And soon they would start overland to New Braunfels, and then on to Fredericksburg, their destination. They did not mind living for a few days in one of those queer looking huts which was not much more than a sand hole. Some people were even living in tents. To their surprise they were placed in one of them. But it was grand to be on solid ground once again. They would only be there a few days. However, the cold rainy season set in. Because of the bad weather and lack of funds the company was slow in providing transportation. Then, to their horror an epidemic of fever broke out. Food was scarce. Both of the women contracted the terrible fever. The efforts of the husbands were futile. And soon Johanna followed her mother and aunt. Ernst Jordan's niece became doubly dear to him then. Mr. Kuckuk became so discouraged that he started North leaving his baby girl with her uncle, Ernst Jordan, and was never heard of again.

Ernst Jordan had come to Texas to make a home. But now there was no incentive for a home. He was alone in a strange land with a helpless infant to care for. He, too, wanted to leave Indianola but he was suffering from exposure and disease. And there was no means of transportation. The only ones who had been able to travel had gone on in the early part of March before the teamsters had repudiated their contracts. War had broken out between the United States and Mexico. The United States Government hired all available teamsters to haul supplies for the soldiers, and paid higher wages than the Society could afford to pay to transport the immigrants. Then, too, the cost of transportation was greater than the Society planned for. The result was immigrants arrived faster than they could be moved. And in March transportation was stopped altogether for a while.

So Ernst Jordan had to abandon all hope of getting away from Indianola until spring. Neither food nor shelter had been provided for such a long stay. Their suffering was beyond description. Their hope lay in the coming of spring when they hoped the terrible rains would cease. But great swarms of mosquitoes came with the spring which added to their misery and suffering, and increased the number of deaths.

Started at Last

When the rains ceased, and the roads began to dry Ernst Jordan determined to get away from Indianola. Somewhere farther west the Society had promised him some land. He determined he would go to it. If he could make the journey safely he could build a home on his land, and provide a home for his niece as he would have for his Johanna. Fortunately he had kept some of his money instead of depositing it with the Society. So he bought a yoke of oxen and a wagon and started for New Braunfels.

Many of the immigrants stricken by disease and exposure had attempted to make that trip on foot. According to early historians many had perished already on this route as "human bones, cast off pieces of clothing, beds, tools, chests, were strewn along the road from Indianola to New Braunfels."

"It will be better when I get to New Braunfels," thought Ernst Jordan. But there he also found suffering. It is estimated that more than 1,000 people died in New Braunfels and Fredericksburg that winter from lack of food, exposure and disease. In spite of von Muesebach's careful management the suffering increased. Only by his powers of persuasion was he able to maintain a semblance of order. How he finally secured funds has been related in a previous story.

Ernst Jordan had been delayed so long in Indianola that he was not among the first group of 120 immigrants who left New Braunfels for Fredericksburg on April 23, 1846. This was not on the Fisher and Miller Grant (where their land was located) but it was another step toward it.

Ernst Jordan left his niece with the family of a friend, promising to come back for her as soon as he could establish a home. He did return several years later, but she was unwilling to go back with him because she no longer knew him, she was afraid of the Indians, and the people with whom she lived did not want to give her up. So she continued to live at New Braunfels, later married and lived near Seguin.

Lonely in the little pioneer village of Fredericksburg Ernst Jordan again tried to establish a home. He married again in 1847. Shortly after his wedding his young wife passed away. Again death had robbed him of a home. And with the bankruptcy of the Society in the same year he lost all his money. Could this be the land of opportunity? Of freedom? Ernst Jordan could not find the answer to these grim questions.

Ernst Jordan and his wife, Lizzette Jordan.

But in those days of pioneering no man or woman could stop because of sorrow. Famine and epidemic were rampant. New homes and new storehouses were being erected. A stockade, a blockhouse and a magazine were built. The *die Vereins-Kirche* (church) was built. Fredericksburg and the surrounding country including what is now Mason county was organized into the precinct of Bexar county in 1847. A year later this precinct became Gillespie county. During the same year Fort Martin Scott was established at Fredericksburg. This not only provided protection against the Indians but also gave employment to many of the colonists. The settlers could now sell their surplus agricultural products for cash at the army post, while some earned money by hauling hay to the fort.

But the suffering was not over for several years. The Society continued to have financial difficulties. When supplies of food were received at the Society's storehouse in New Braunfels there was some delay before sending it on to Fredericksburg. The population was on the verge of starvation. On one occasion Ernst Jordan with six other men walked from Fredericksburg to New Braunfels, a distance of eighty miles straight through, in two days. Armed with clubs they went to the Society's storehouse and demanded food for the starving inhabitants of Fredericksburg. Their demand was granted and soon wagon loads of food arrived.

In 1849 cholera broke out in Texas. Because of lack of sufficient food the citizens of Fredericksburg were easy victims to the prey of that terrible disease. Many families fled to the hills hoping to escape. A Methodist preacher by the name of Schneider is said to have prayed with the people every day and night that the cholera might stop. Protestants and Catholics held prayer meetings together. The disease disappeared by the middle of summer.

Through all the ups and downs of those perilous days Ernst Jordan was a dauntless and a fearless worker. He helped nurse the sick, and he helped bury the dead. He was in the front ranks of those other brave souls who blazed the way for the many opportunities enjoyed in that section of the State today.

"It is darkest just before the dawn," is an old proverb. With each new difficulty or setback Ernst Jordan wondered if the dawn could ever penetrate through the wall of darkness. But the rosy clouds did begin to filter through for him in 1849, the darkest year since his arrival in Texas.

During 1846 the Bickenbachs, another family of Germans from Oehleroth, District of Cologne, Prussia, also came to Texas. They escaped the epidemic at Indianola and came on to Fredericksburg There Ernst met one of the Bickenbach girls, Lizzette. In 1849 they were married and lived in Ernst's log cabin on his ten-acre plot in Fredericksburg.

God Fearing People

They were both devout Christians, having been reared in the faith of the Evangelical Church. But shortly after their marriage they joined the Methodist Church under the leadership of a pioneer Methodist preacher, Rev. Charles A. Grote. They helped to build the large stone church house which is still standing and in use today. Once again Ernst was happy. He had a home where a warm welcome awaited him at the close of the day's labor.

But Ernst and his wife still had two great ambitions—to become citizens of the United States and to build a home on their land still farther out in the wilderness beyond the Llano River.

The oaths as required by court were taken November 12, 1850, although the certificates of citizenship were not received until October 20, 1854. That was an important event in their lives. Now they were citizens of their adopted country.

Ernst Jordan had received an allotment of a 640-acre tract of land on the Concho River. Because it was so unfavorably located he sold the land scrip for $40. He then paid $225 for 640 acres (the present Ernst Jordan place) on Upper Willow Creek.

In the meantime four children had arrived—Minnie, Peter, Sophie, and Henry. So a happy family of six with household goods loaded on an ox-drawn wagon started to their land on Upper Willow Creek (now in Mason county) in the fall of 1856. The Hoersters and Kothmanns went with them.

They had worked together, shared each other's joys and sorrows. *They knew* they could build a community together. They would be on their own land shortly after they crossed the Llano. The men were sure they would know when each would touch his own soil. Mrs. Jordan and the children were eager to know just when they crossed on to their land. Baby Henry was fretful. Ernst Jordan stopped his team under a large liveoak (still standing). While the mother was trying to quiet the baby, Mr. Jordan was thinking.

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"We are now on our own land!" he exclaimed proudly.

Happily they scrambled back onto the wagon, and finally arrived at the log cabin Ernst Jordan had built for them.

There was never any home more beautiful they thought. The two small rooms with a porch across the front set high upon the west bank of Upper Willow Creek under the protecting branches of the massive pecan trees. It was a typical pioneer cabin, containing one outside door and one small window in each room. Its walls were thick enough to protect the Jordans from heat and cold, and from probable Indian raids. It was the home for which he came to Texas nearly twelve years before.

The simple furnishing included home-made beds, raw-hide bottom chairs, a home-made table, and a spinning wheel. Cooking was done on the large open fireplace in iron kettles and skillets.

Ernst Jordan, a weaver by trade, had already recognized the importance of agriculture in the new country, and had bought some cattle before leaving Fredericksburg. He bought some more. Soon he would see his herd grazing on the hillsides. But a market would have to be found.

Did Odd Jobs

In the meantime, Ernst Jordan had to make a living, so he continued to haul supplies from Indianola, San Antonio, and Austin to the frontier forts, going as far west as Ft. Stockton, Ft. McKavett and Ft. Concho. He also hauled corn from the Brazos and Colorado valleys to Ft. Stockton. He would be gone for weeks on one of these long dangerous trips, while Mrs. Jordan remained at home alone with her children.

The children were taught to work. As they grew older their responsibilities increased. When Peter was still in his early teens he went to Ft. McKavett with a friend. For three months they camped out and cooked their own food, having brought flour and bacon with them. They cut and hauled cord wood for the fort. Peter earned $200 in gold for this work. When he came home he handed $195 to his father, keeping only $5 for himself.

And while Ernst Jordan and Peter were away, Mrs. Jordan and the smaller children were carrying their part of the load at home. They raised a garden, cared for the chickens and hogs and milked the cows.

Mrs. Jordan was thrifty and believed in living at home. During the summer months, she and the children put up the surplus vegetables to be used during the winter months. Kraut was put up by the barrel. She cooked fresh corn a little while in wash pots or kettles, then salted it down in big barrels or stone jars. She also put up green beans and pickles in salt in large quantities. When ready for use she washed the vegetables and soaked them in cold water to remove the excess salt. Lettuce was also a favorite vegetable. She frequently served pancakes, bacon and lettuce together. Her children, and later her grand children, thought no one could bake pancakes quite as good as "Mother Jordan," as she was affectionately known. Syrup was made from home-grown cane. The juice was extracted by running the cane through a press, then cooking it in large flat pans over an outdoor fire. She made watermelon preserves — really a thick syrup—by scraping the red meat from the rine, then run through a home-made colander made by punching holes in the bottom of a tin pan with a big nail.

There was never an idle moment. With washing and ironing, weaving, sewing and knitting, Mother Jordan and the girls were always busy.

Four more children were born after the Ernst Jordans moved to Upper Willow Creek—Fredrika, William (died in infancy), Daniel, and Ernst. The happiest time of the day was after supper when the family sat around the fireplace. While the wind howled outside, inside they were warm and cozy. Mrs. Jordan and the girls plied their knitting needles industriously, they told stories and sang lovely old German songs. During the summer nights they sat on the porch.

One bright moonlight night Mr. Jordan continued to sit on the porch after the others members of the family had gone to bed. The horses were always kept inside of the yard on moonlight nights because then the Indian raids were more likely to occur. Silently an Indian opened the gate and started toward the horse nearest the house.

"Hello," called Father Jordan.

The Indian disappeared as quickly and as silently as he came. Soon the Indian's signal—the sound of a bellowing bull—was heard and the answers given by his companions in reply. But they did not come back for the horses.

Just one other time did the Jordans have any experience with the Indians. In broad daylight they made a raid on Upper Willow Creek and stole Henry Hoerster's horses. Peter Jordan joined the chase. They did not follow the tracks

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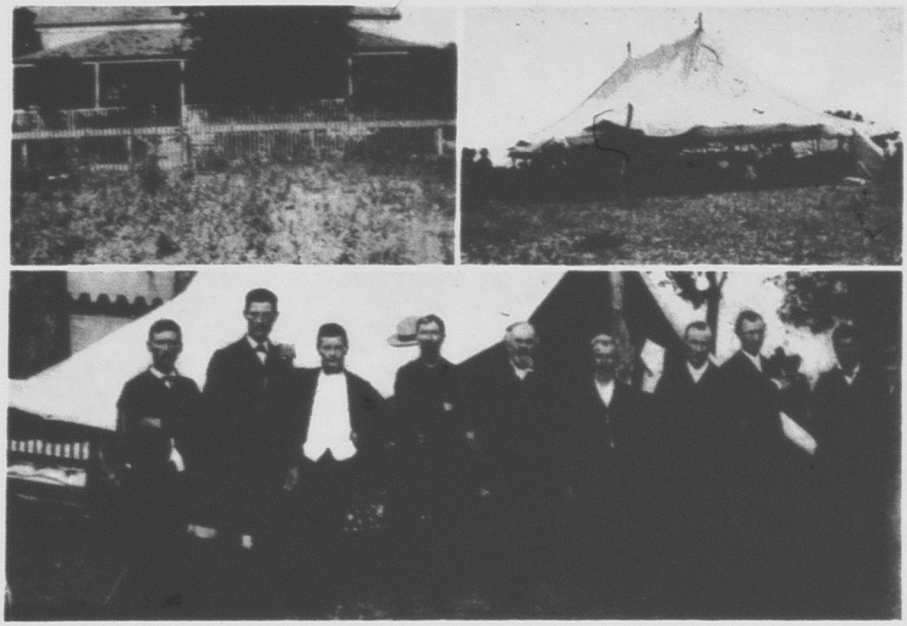

Upper left—The Ernst Jordan homestead on Upper Willow Creek. Upper right—A scene at one of the first camp meetings held on Lower Willow Creek. Lower—The preachers who assisted in conducting the early camp meetings. From left to right they are: Reverend John Wellman, Henry Jordan (Ernst Jordan's son), Jacob Kern, Wm. Knolle, Rev. Merkel, Schaurich, Rev. Vordenbaum, P. H. Hensch and Gus Bogeusch.

of the Indians but set out in the direction which the Indians had taken on previous raids. But the Indians were clever enough to take a different route. After a long, fruitless search Peter and his companions turned back. To their great surprise they found the tracks of the Indians, where they had crossed their path behind them, but it was too late. The Indians had too great a start on them. However, had they known that this band of Indians had with them a white boy, Adolph Korn, whom they had captured near Castell, they would have again started in rapid pursuit.

Mother Jordan kept a close watch on her children for fear one of them might be captured by the Indians. One of the favorite sports of the two younger boys, Daniel and Ernst, was to make long trips —about one mile—down Willow Creek *to Indianola* with their yoke of oxen-corn cobs. They also stopped at *Austin* and *San Antonio* to get additional supplies just as they had heard their father say he did. During one of the long dangerous trips *an Indian* appeared. Abandoning their wagon and faithful yoke of oxen they soon left the Indian far behind and made it safely home into Mother Jordan's comforting arms. Never again would they get so far away from home. Years later they learned that *the Indian* was their own sister, Sophia, who had been sent to frighten them so they would not stray too far away from home during those years of real Indian dangers.

Mr. and Mrs. Jordan were interested in their children having the best educational opportunities possible at that time. A young German, Otto von Donop, who had been educated in the University of Berlin, was engaged to teach the children in the community. At first he taught in the Jordan home. Then a log house was built which was used for both a school and a church.

While they had regular church services almost from the start the summer camp meetings were occasions to which everybody looked forward. They were held under a brush arbor, and lasted from five to seven days. Light was from coal oil lanterns. While the people for miles around looked forward to visiting with each other, as well as to attend the religious services, it was also a meeting place for the preachers. Several usually attended. Rev. Charles A. Grote, a pioneer preacher who organized the first charge at Castell, was one of the main preachers in the early camp meetings. Mrs. Jordan and her daughters, as did other mothers and daughters, sewed for weeks in advance in order for each member of the family to have enough clean clothes to last through the meeting. Extra bedding had to be provided. During the last few days before they started for the camp grounds they baked hams, fried chickens, baked bread, cakes and pies in order not to have to spend so much time in cooking.

Finally the great day came. Immediately upon arrival, Mr. Jordan and the boys pitched their tent and built a little brush arbor. A tent was used to dress in. Meals were served under this little brush arbor. There they would entertain their visitors. Mrs. Jordan and the girls were busily making up beds and getting everything in place, and while everybody was busy getting things in order they were also visiting. Many people who were good friends only saw each other during these camp meetings. Finally, the camp was ready. The great brush arbor, the many tents with their small arbors and covered wagons near by under the branches of the big trees, made a never to be forgotten sight.

At first the camp meetings were conducted much on the line of the Quaker meetings, but gradually they developed a regular routine. They started with morning devotion at each camp, with song or songs, prayer and Scripture reading. This was kept up until time for the camp meeting to start. It sounded very lovely to hear singing from all directions. At about 9:30 or 10:00 o'clock they would gather for regular services which lasted until noon. In the afternoon they again would have services. And after supper they would have group prayer meetings.

While meals were served at each individual family camp, two families usually camped together. They were careful to see that all visitors were served.

The camp meetings were held at various places, the first one being held at Lower Willow Creek in 1867. Camp meetings were also held at Castell and on Upper Willow Creek. In 1876 the camp meeting was held for the first time on Ernst Jordan's place under the spreading branches of huge pecan trees.

These meetings required many sacrifices, but these brave pioneers returned home spiritually refreshed and with renewed faith; and encouraged by their mutual social contacts.

Pioneers such as Reverend Vordenbaum, Grote, Schaper, Kern, Bader, Knolle, and others, stood as mighty powers bringing the gospel message of salvation to their eager listeners.

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The church was the very soul of the German people that settled in Mason county; it was the center of their community life. It was there each individual received new inspiration for his daily living.

Ernst Jordan had donated the land on which the old log church and school was built. It was replaced in 1875 by a sandstone structure which is still standing and is being used as a school building.

In the late sixties the Methodist Episcopal Church organized congregations in the regions of the Llano. Ernst Jordan and his wife decided to remain with the M. E. Church South. In 1868 a stone church was built near the junction of the Willow Creek and the Llano River, a central location which could be used by both churches. But the Ernst Jordans continued to worship in the little church on Upper Willow Creek whenever services were held. At other times they went to Castell because they were charter members. Here services were generally held under a large liveoak tree or in the homes of the people. In 1871 the old picket church was built. Peter Jordan helped to cut the pickets.

As the population increased more church facilities were needed. The first unit of a new church was built in Castell in 1880. Mr. and Mrs. Jordan donated a ten-acre tract of land on which to build a larger church on Upper Willow Creek. Here in 1890 a spacious brown sandstone church was erected and is still being used. In addition to the presentation of land, Ernst Jordan also contributed $125—a large sum at that time. His sons helped haul the supplies and worked on the building.

So the hardships were interspersed with occasions of joy. Weddings were great occasions. The Jordan children, with one exception, married at home. They were married in the morning. Dinner was served at noon on the porch, and consisted of plenty of meat, salad, fruit, cake and coffee. Wine was always served. A toast was given to the bridal couple after which they sang *"Hoch Sollen sil leben."*

Father and Mother Jordan were happy to have their children marry and settle near them. Minnie married Dan Hoerster (who was killed by some outlaws). Later she married F. A. Grote.

Peter married Emma Donop. Sophie married August Willman. Henry married Bertha Leifeste. Fredrika married Charlie Leifeste. Daniel married Emilie Willman. Ernst married Adelia Winkel.

Peter Jordan, of Mason, is the only one of the children now living.

After the close of the Civil War, times were some better for Mr. Jordan. His cattle had increased. He could devote more time in caring for them. Gradually he ceased hauling supplies for the forts.

There were no fences in those days. Roundups or cow hunts from four to eight times each year were necessary. He trained his sons thoroughly on the cow hunts before he fenced 900 acres of land in 1876 with oak rail and rock fences. Realizing that in the near future all the ranches would be fenced and there would be no open range, Ernst Jordan planned to buy all the land he could. Between 1874-1884 he bought 6,320 acres of land. These, with previous holdings, made him the proud owner of about 7,000 acres of choice grazing and fertile farm land.

But best of all he had achieved his great desire—a home. There he and Mother Jordan had reared a family of Christian men and women who were respected citizens in the community.

In 1891 he was stricken by an illness that ended in his death on December 23, 1892, just 47 years after he landed at Galveston. In spite of all his difficulties his life was crowned with success. Although he had very little formal education he served his country wisely and well, always supporting the cause of right and justice.

He was laid to rest in the family cemetery. Mother Jordan joined him seven years later. She too had contributed her share in braving the dangers of the frontier. They had devoted their lives to the task of converting the wilderness into a civilization enjoyed by their children's children today.

EDITOR'S NOTE

23 grand champion calves have been fed and shown by the following great-grand children of Ernst Jordan. Sam Hoerster, Jr., Hazel Hoerster, Franklin Hoerster, John D. Jordan, August Jordan, Clifford Jordan, James Grote and Victor Lehmberg.

These grand champions were shown at the shows at Fort Worth, San Angelo, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Amarillo, Texas Centennial, American Royal, Denver and San Francisco.

"I have been a subscriber for many years and always look forward to receiving 'The Cattleman' each month. Each issue seems to surpass the last one and the articles on horses and the cow-horse are quite outstanding. The various photos and especially the wonderful ones by E. E. Smith on the covers always recall memories of bygone days to us old timers."—C. Rynar, Box 817, Westbury, L. I., N. Y.

"I look forward to 'The Cattleman' each month."—J. H. Dirstine, San Mateo, Calif.

Harrisdale Makes $314 Average Before Small Crowd

THE crowd in attendance at the Harrisdale Hereford sale at Fort Worth on February 17 was so small, due to the cold, the rain and the mud, that at noon it looked as though Dr. Harris might decide not to sell but a few more came in and about 12:30 P. M. the auction was started. A total of 12 bulls and 48 females were sold for an average of $314. The top price of $660 was paid by W. F. Stribling, Llano, for Prince Domino Lad, with H. H. Wilkinson, Fort Worth, the contending bidder. The bulls met a draggy market and only 12 were offered.

The top female was Princess Domino R. 68th that sold to T. M. Armstrong, Gladewater, at $650. Jinkins Hereford Ranch, Normangee, paid $610 for Lady Domino 101st, and Warren V. Woody, Chicago, paid $600 for Princess Domino 91st, while Ben Eastman took Princess Return 6th at $510. The same figure was paid by J. F. Winston, Vernon, for Hilda Domino, and A. W. Burnside, Iowa Park, obtained Valentine Stanway at $500. Prices on the other females ranged generally from $250 up to $450.

Other names appearing on the buyers list were Jos. Radotinsky, Kansas City, Kans.; F. E. Myers, Apache, Okla.; M. L. Smiley, Paris; W. N. Vickery, Blackwell; Geo. Keith & Sons, Wichita Falls; Ernest Allen, Fort Worth; Carl Metzger, Dallas; Tom Hill, Eliasville; G. P. Mitcham, Cisco; Jay Pumphrey, Old Glory; F. W. Worley, Rockdale; J. R. Coody, Caddo; Carl B. King, Dallas; L. C. Hutson, Chickasha, Okla.; D. F. Maberry, McCauley; Waddell Bros., Kermit; J. B. Brandon, Gorman; Ronald Scharf, Fort Worth; Lanius Hereford Ranch, Godley; Hugh H. White, Keller; W. H. Beene, Shreveport, La.; Dr. G. T. Blackwell, Gorman; Jas. M. Bohart, Apache, Okla.; Joe Ablowich, Clarksville; M. Calloway, Fort Worth; Louis Cerf, Ennis; J. F. Henry, Lancaster. Earl Gartin was the auctioneer and he was assisted by the newspaper representatives.

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